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Introduction and overview

The background to this paper

The story of the International Baccalaureate (IB) over recent years is one of unequivocal success in terms of both statistical growth and infrastructure development. The rather humble origins of the IB are exposed by Alec Peterson's (1972 p.122) remark that: 'The International Baccalaureate project is a small-scale experiment in international education designed to solve certain very limited problems at present facing International Schools. Could it lead to something more substantial?' There were just 22 IB schools, in 14 countries, in existence when Peterson (1972 p.31) had commented that: 'There is already every reason, however, to suppose that this experiment will prove successful...'

One can now safely deduce that Peterson was right in his prophecy, and in November 2014 the 'IB World' encompassed almost 4,000 schools in 146 countries. The original IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) for 17-19 year olds had been joined by 1997 by two others, at primary level (the Primary Years Programme: PYP) and middle-school level (the Middle Years Programme: MYP, ages 11-16). Although always having been offered by some state schools, the three programmes had emanated largely from within the international school 'movement' (see Hill, 2010, for a comprehensive history), a body of schools originating in a formal sense in 1924 with the establishment of the International School of Geneva, and Yokohama International School, aimed at catering for children of

expatriates. The main three programmes had been joined in 2012, a year which marked the 50th Anniversary of the IBDP (see Hill, 2010 p.37) by a Career-related Programme (the IBCP), plus distance-learning programmes, creating a complex 'menu' of choice and provision. At an infrastructure level, the IB has been successfully divided into three 'global centres'; in Bethesda (Maryland), The Hague and Singapore.

The IB between April and June 2014 authorized 147 schools, of which 13 were in Ecuador and 50 in the United States (US) but none in the United Kingdom (UK), reflecting rather disparate global growth trends. The globally-branded 'IB' has clearly come a long way since its inception as the Geneva-registered Swiss-foundation International Baccalaureate Office (IBO) 'experiment in international education' on the 25th October 1968 (Hill, 2010 p.72). The level of change, both in scale and nature, is well shown by an examination of the much earlier work published in this journal by Hayden and Thompson (1995).

The IB has hit numerous statistical milestones since 2010. In May 2011 the IB hit the 4,000 programme mark after a school in Wuxi, China was authorized. This was an exact doubling in number over five years reflecting the rapid growth since 2006, when the American-Jeffrey Beard had become the sixth IB Director General (replaced by Siva Kumari in October 2013). There were 3,288 IB schools worldwide at the time of the 4,000 programme (note that many schools offer more than one programme so that figure is higher than the number of schools). A discussion about the growth of the IB can easily get bogged down with the (rapidly changing) figures, but these immediately help frame the subsequent discussion about the IB in the UK.

Although the IB offers a curricula ‘menu’, exactly half of all schools worldwide in June 2014 offered *only* the IBDP reflecting the relative importance of the original programme. Moreover, 81% of all schools offer only *one* programme reflecting the fact that the three main programmes need to be viewed separately. Each has its own growth pattern. Globally, the IBDP, like the other two main programmes, is largely on the rise. In November 2011 there were a total of 2,296 IBDP schools in 139 countries. Exactly three years later this had risen to 2,626 schools in 139 countries, representing a 14% increase.

The IB programmes have grown enormously in the US and this nation (California and Florida especially) houses by far the most IBDP schools; in November 2014 there were 830 IBDP schools in the US, over five times more than in the UK. Alongside this, there were a further 443 PYP schools and 544 MYP schools. The UK by comparison had just 13 PYP and 12 MYP schools. All three of the IB’s main programmes have found a definite ‘home’ in the US, and it will be interesting to view the growth of the fledgling IBCP in the US in future years.

The IBDP gathered substantial momentum in the UK, especially in state schools, around 2007 and was reportedly ‘booming in Britain’ (Davis, 2010) in February 2010. The growth since 2007 can be shown by the fact that UK-based IBDP graduates accounted for 1.2% of UK university applicants in 2012 compared to 0.8% in 2008 (Cartwright, 2013). It was expected, with much confidence by commentators that the IBDP would reach out to perhaps as many as 400 schools by 2013. The UK Government still seem to have faith in the IBDP, describing it (Barker, 2013) as a ‘roaring triumph’ and providing a ‘genuine world-class education’.

However, the fact of the matter is that the IBDP by 2013 was in serious decline in the UK (note here that although I am using the term *UK*, 95% of IB schools are in *England*, and none are in Northern Ireland), particularly in state schools, and the issue requires some attention in terms of explanation and implications. The IBDP in *all* other nation states (139 in totals) has either grown or stayed constant in number which reveals the uniqueness of the situation. This paper is seemingly the first to attempt to address this phenomenon. The sudden, and largely un-predicted, fading away of the IBDP in the UK since its peak in 2010 has attracted very little attention or discussion even within the UK itself.

The outline of this paper

Having set the scene and rationale, this paper will next chart the historical rise and decline of the IBDP in the UK. The main sources of statistical information has come from the UK popular press, namely *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and the *Times Educational Supplement*. These four media sources form the base of discussion in the public domain in the UK. The first two sources in particular account for the largest bloc of material about the IB. Much of the data discussed in these media sources had in turn emanated from the UK's main regional association; the IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA). The data comparing the situation after three years had been collected by me from the official IB website (at www.ibo.org). This data, which is automatically updated daily, had been collected by me on the 25th November 2011, the 20th June 2014 and then 20th November 2014.

It will be shown that the involvement of the IB's programmes in the UK, involving less than 100 schools until 2007, seemingly peaked at about 230 schools in September 2010, with a body of about 140 state schools and 90 private, but had fallen back to 155 by June 2014, and had fallen a further 7% to 144 by November 2014. The decline of almost 90 schools in the UK between the peak of September 2010 and November 2014, and in state schools in England in particular involves a complex set of forces. This paper will subsequently discuss some of the reasons for the decline.

There are seemingly four, inter-connected major issues. Firstly, and most crucially, the IBDP is expensive to operate but is considerably under-funded. It involves 6 subjects plus other core elements, yet is only funded as equivalent to 4.5 General Certificate of Education Advanced Levels (commonly termed 'A-Levels'). In practice it can even be less than this, in 2013 schools received GBP 4,000 per full-time student which many schools say only covers about 3 A-Levels (Vaughan, 2013). This may act as a barrier in state-funded schools, especially at a time of financial cuts.

Secondly, the IBDP is a deliberately challenging programme of study but still under-valued. The breadth of the programme (i.e. students must undergo six subjects across a range of disciplines, plus other elements comprising a 'core') defies formal assessment whilst universities still do not seem to give full credit for the separate yet crucial elements of the 'core', which are namely CAS (Creativity, Action, Service), the ethics-oriented Theory of Knowledge (ToK) or the 4,000-word Extended Essay. The 'top' IBDP candidates i.e. those gaining more than the world average 33-points up to the maximum 45-points (note here that each of the six subjects has a top-grade of 7, plus the ToK and Extended Essay elements can add a further three points) in particular are seemingly

under-valued. In this context, this paper should be seen as a complementary one to the study published in this journal by Green and Vignoles (2012) which had revealed that the ‘top’ IBDP candidates in particular were being unfairly treated at admissions level by UK universities when compared to students studying the same courses who had done A-Levels. This issue has seemingly adversely affected the growth of the IBDP although this statement requires research validation.

Thirdly, the IBDP is consistently-assessed with no ‘grade-inflation’ over time yet is often offered as an ‘alternative’ to the ‘grade inflation’ afflicted A-Level. In practice, the A-Level is (or at least was) seemingly getting easier pass and get a top grade. A rationally-thinking student would choose the examination that seems to be getting easier, thus demand for the IBDP has likely fallen within some schools (again, this requires research validation). All three of these issues prove that the IBDP has serious *structural* barriers to growth in the UK (in state-funded schools in England and Wales in particular). It is not just an issue of information, recognition, awareness or understanding although this is all on-going problems. Fourthly, the IBDP has been joined by a number of deliberate ‘imitations’. The Extended Essay and the element of community service within CAS has in particular caught the imagination of curriculum makers and the Cambridge Pre-U since 2008, for example, may have stifled the growth of the IBDP (here we have another potential research area).

Alongside this set of ‘internal’ forces, there is other less obvious ‘external’ issues. The Geneva-registered IBDP is an attractive curriculum choice for schools tired of political interference, yet ironically the programme has suffered at the decisions by successive UK governments to both introduce alternative ‘Diplomas’ and ‘Baccalaureates’ and overhaul

the conventional A-Levels, a long-standing issue last revisited in 2013, plus it has been affected by attempts to ‘equalize’ the programme with A-Levels for university tariff purposes i.e. there is still considerable disagreement over its exact *worth* and *value*.

As a result, the programme has waned in-and-out of political support. The Labour government hand-over between Prime Minister Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in June 2007 being the most obvious sea-change in opinion as the incoming administration introduced its own version of a ‘Diploma’. This in turn was dropped by the incoming Conservative-led coalition in 2010 who have instead talked about an ‘English Baccalaureate’, alongside the existing Welsh one. This unpredictable situation has probably somewhat clouded the role and need of the IBDP.

Furthermore, the decline of the IBDP in England and Wales since its peak in September 2010 reveals how the fundamental argument between ‘specialization’ and ‘breadth’ at post-16 level has still to be fully discussed and resolved in spite of five decades of IB existence. It would appear that the supporters of depth and specialization are currently winning the argument over those who prefer breadth and balance. Again, this reflects political and economic changes over time. In short, the A-Level in England and Wales still commands substantial support both in schools and government. The IBDP on the other hand is still looking largely like a peripheral and ‘eccentric’ programme reliant on support from established and vocal ‘champion’ schools such as Sevenoaks School in Kent, and academic commentators such as Sir Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College, who has praised it as ‘the platinum standard’ (Oakes and Seldon, 2011) offering intellectual breadth and critical-thinking skills.

The decline explored

A historical overview of the situation

The rise of the IBDP in the UK

The IB has strong roots in the UK. The original Diploma Programme had been partly ‘conceived’ by two schools in the summer of 1962 (see Hill, 2010 p.43). The International School of Geneva, led by social science teachers within the Geneva-based International Schools Association, was busy creating a Contemporary History course, sat by the first five students in June 1963 (see Hill, 2010 p.39). This might be seen as the ‘International’, or ideological, side of the IB. At the same time, in a separate initiative, Alec Peterson and others at The Atlantic (United World) College in a south Wales castle were busy ‘inventing’ a broader and more balanced alternative to English and Welsh Advanced Levels (A-Levels). This might be seen as the ‘Baccalaureate’, or pragmatic, side of the IB. These two schools would now be identified as ‘Type B’ ‘Ideological’ International Schools (Hayden and Thompson, 2013), with a mission to serve United Nations principles and facilitate global peace (see Van Oord’s 2010 paper in this journal). These two set of initial ‘instigators’ seemingly met for the first time sometime in 1964 (see Hill, 2010 p.44).

Not surprisingly, the first IB schools in the UK were of the diverse ‘International School’

variety, the original laboratories (Fox, 1985), although the North Manchester High School for Girls' helped form the second batch of seven trial exam schools in 1968 alongside more conventional schools such as the Copenhagen International School (then called Copenhagen International High School). The latter would now be identified as a 'Type A' 'Traditional' International School (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). St. Clare's Oxford (a 'Type B' school founded in the aftermath of the Second World War) became in 1976 the first school in England to adopt the IBDP, joining forces with Atlantic College in Wales. The Anglo-European School in Ingatestone in Essex in 1982 became the first state school in the UK to offer the IBDP. This type of school might be seen now as a 'Type C' 'Non-traditional' International School. The year after, Sevenoaks became the first member of the prestigious Headmasters Conference (HMC: the so-called 'public schools') to offer the IBDP and began switching over completely in 1999. In 1992, Broadgreen Comprehensive School (now called Broagreen International School) in Liverpool had emerged as a leading 'champion' state-funded IBDP school (Leney, 2006). At this point in time, there was a body of less than 30 IB schools in the United Kingdom. The 50-mark was not hit until 2003 (this growth data is available at www.ibo.org).

The IBDP got two significant 'boosts' in 2006, although both soon proved to be false dawns. Firstly, in 2006 Prime Minister Blair had announced GBP 2.5m worth of funding that state schools in England could apply for through their Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to help them cover the costs of applying for the two-year IBDP accreditation-process. The aim was for 124 of England's 150 LEAs to have one IBDP school each. However, the Brown-led government had announced in March 2008 that it would scrap

the scheme and Education Secretary Ed Balls was even quoted (Clark, 2008) as saying he believed the IBDP would totally disappear in state schools by 2013. By that stage 40 schools had secured funding and a further 26 were already in the process. There were around 80 IB schools in the UK at that point in time (Leney, 2006).

Secondly, the IBDP was ‘landed a windfall’ (Jackson, 2007) in 2007 when given ‘a standing ovation’ by the University and College Admissions System (UCAS) and awarded a favourable tariff conversion with A-Levels: the maximum 45-points at IBDP level was deemed equivalent to six Grade As at A-Level (Clare, 2006). A fairly common 30 IBDP points was set at 419 UCAS points. However, this tariff was revised in October 2010. The IBDP was knocked-down: pupils with 30 IBDP points will now have a UCAS tariff of 392 (Stewart, 2010).

These two short-lived but important boosts meant that the IBDP did duly take-off. The number of state schools overtook independent ones for the first time in June 2006 when 85 schools in total were offering it (51 were state schools). It was being reported (Henry, 2006) that Wellington College would run the IBDP alongside A-Levels in 2008. The IB hit the 100-mark in the UK in October 2007 (Jackson, 2007); the 24 schools authorized that year had brought the total at the end of 2007 to 117.

In February 2007 there had been 42 independent schools offering the IBDP (Morrison, 2007) including Scotland’s elite Fettes College, the *alma mater* of Prime Minister Tony Blair. The IB was still being billed ‘a little known curiosity’ (Jackson, 2007) although there were reports (Lightfoot, 2007) of the number of independent schools possibly

doubling over the next few years. A year later, in March 2008, the IBDP was on offer in 122 schools in the UK, over half of which (66 in total) were state-funded (Beckett, 2008).

There was talk of some schools getting ready to abandon A-Levels (Paton, 2008). It was reported in March 2009 that the number of IB schools in the UK would reach 300 by the end of 2010, a near doubling from the-then 167 (Mansell and Paton, 2009) and a quadrupling of the 2006 figures. The IB itself had said in March 2009 that 173 schools in the UK had officially registered an interest, 95 of which were in the state sector.

The emergent sense of optimism about the potential growth of the IBDP in the UK was summed up in the newspaper article in February 2010 (Davis, 2010a) entitled ‘Go for growth’. At that time there were 210 schools. The IB itself expected growth to continue, and to double at around 400 schools by 2013. It was reported that much of the growth was expected to come from Academies (state-funded independent schools), plus there was optimism that an incoming Conservative government might back the IBDP (in fact, a Conservative-led coalition was elected in May 2010).

The IBDP appeared to reach its zenith in the UK about September 2010 when it was reported (Davis, 2010b) that there were 149 state schools offering it, plus another 11 applying to offer it. Furthermore, of the 83 schools that had registered a formal interest since 2007, 70 were from the state-sector. In other words, there was the potential for at least 230 state schools to be offering it from 2010 onwards alongside the growing number of private schools. It was noted by me that in September 2010 there were a total of 230

IB schools in the UK and I believe this to be the highest number ever recorded.

The decline of the IBDP in the UK

The number of IB schools began to drop shortly after September 2010. In November 2010 it was being reported that there were 222 IBDP schools in the UK (Middleton, 2010), the highest number I have seen reported in the national press. By February 2011 the number had fallen to 217, which included 139 state schools and 78 independent. At that point in time the IBDP was still being lauded (e.g. Moore, 2011) as an ‘imaginative programme’ and a ‘stable, solid currency you can trust’. There was even discussion (e.g. Priestley, 2011) in March 2011 about fully replacing A-Levels with the IBDP. Yet, at the same time, in May 2011, IBSCA was warning that state schools were beginning to drop the programme (Stewart, 2011).

By 2012 there was reports (Hurst, 2012) about the IBDP falling ‘out of favour’, and King’s College Wimbledon announced it was to drop the programme from September 2013 onwards (Paton, 2012). The Harris Federation of Academy schools, comprising of 12 schools, had said it was ‘suspending’ the IBDP from September 2012 onwards citing funding issues and lack of demand from students (Exley, 2012).

Instead of reaching 400 schools as had been expected in 2010, the-then IB Director General Jeffrey Beard was quoted in *The Sunday Times* (23rd June, 2013) as saying that

the IBDP was in a 'death spiral', citing funding cuts forcing schools to replace it with conventional A-Levels as the main reason. At that point in time there were 64 state schools offering the IBDP, down from 99 in June 2011, and at least 170 short of the number that had been projected in 2010. Shortly after, the Headmaster of one leading English independent school, Haileybury, was quoted in *The Hertfordshire Mercury* (1st July 2013) as saying he was 'disappointed' with the situation. The decline of the IBDP was seen by some commentators as a 'travesty' (Barker, 2013). A subsequent letter to the *TES* (19 July 2013) from the Chief Executive of the Independent Schools Association (namely Neil Roskilly) added that the programme's 'fate looks bleak'. Roskilly stated that much of the blame lies with the schools themselves who operate the IBDP in tandem with A-Levels even though it is economically unviable, plus it is difficult to staff the teaching of IBDP Maths which includes broad but compulsory elements and it is difficult to 'sell' the IBDP to teenagers who view A-Levels as a more natural progression from the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Fourthly, there is the high cost of training teachers. Put together, this offers a difficult set of marketing, financial and teaching barriers for the IBDP to 'hurdle'.

The sudden rise-and-decline of the IBDP in the UK is well reflected in the number of students taking the May examinations (see the *Annual Bulletins* at www.ibo.org). In May 2006 there were 2,402 candidates sitting in schools in the UK (out of a total of 72,170 worldwide). In May 2008 there were 3,160 candidates across the UK. In May 2010 there were 4,496 candidates. In May 2011 this figure had risen to 5,017. In other words, the number of candidates in the UK had more than doubled between 2006 and 2011. In May

2013 the figures for the UK had dropped 4,590 candidates, out of a worldwide total of 127,284. Of these, 70,568 were based in the US. The subsequent figure for the UK in 2013 was only slightly higher than it had been in May 2010 (94 more candidates).

In June 2014 just 4% of all IB schools worldwide were in the UK. This figure had stood at 6.6% in November 2011. Looking at the IBDP alone, the UK had 9.1% of all schools worldwide in November 2011 but this had fallen to 5.8% in June 2014. Conversely, and perhaps strikingly, in June 2014 40.2% of the world's 3,804 'IB World Schools' were located in the US. If one factors in Canada's 338 IB schools (over half of which are MYP schools), the global figure of US and Canada combined is 49%. As the IB grows, it becomes noticeably more North American-centric. The decline of the IBDP in the UK adds to this picture. In this context, the decline of the IBDP probably does *matter* if the programme is to remain to be viewed as an *international* one.

A geographical overview of the situation

As the IBDP is 'international' it seems worth further considering what was happening in other countries. Only Greece and Denmark saw a fall in IB provision overall from November 2011 until June 2014 (Greece's numbers fell from 14 to 13 schools, and Denmark lost two schools to reach 13). Therefore, the fall of 62 IB schools in the UK (from 217 to 155) during that point in time does stand out globally as being remarkably 'against the tide'.

The number of schools in the UK offering the IBDP had dropped by June 2014 to 147, a fall of 64 (exactly 30%) over the two and a half years since November 2011. As seen already, the number of schools offering the PYP and MYP had risen by one, but overall the number of IB schools had dropped quite considerably. The number of IB schools in Wales, according to my analysis, had peaked at six in 2008 and Scotland had seemingly ‘lost’ one state school. In other words, the fall of 64 IBDP schools had involved 61 in England. The decline had thus been an IBDP and a largely England-based phenomenon.

To put the fall of 64 schools into some sort of statistical context consider that in June 2014, 38 countries worldwide had less than 10 IBDP schools and only seven countries had more than 64 countries. Furthermore, there were only 38 IBDP schools to be found across the whole of Africa. In other words, the 147 IBDP schools in the UK at that point in time was still a significant number, representing by far the third largest bloc of schools worldwide (after USA and Canada, and way ahead of India’s 98 schools). In this context, Beard’s remarks about a ‘death spiral’ may be viewed as premature and an exaggeration, the IBDP in June 2014 was not ‘dead’ in the UK and it still existed at a historically high level of presence, but a decline of 64 was a significant amount in IB statistical terms thus Beard’s level of consternation was understandable.

To put the decline in the UK into some sort of geographical context, consider that this was the *only* nation state across the world to see a drop in IBDP provision between November 2011 and June 2014. The *TES* had noted this point, remarking on how the IB

was ‘on the rise’ in many developing countries and how Ecuador planned to have 500 schools by 2018 (Barker, 2013). In total, an extra 252 IBDP schools had appeared worldwide since December 2011, an increase of 11%. This would have been 18% had the anticipated 400 schools in the UK appeared by 2014.

Two key conclusions can be drawn from this. Firstly, the decline of 64 IBDP schools in may not seem a lot in terms of overall school provision in a nation the size of England but it is a sizeable amount in IB terms, and was equivalent in June 2014 to the bloc of schools found in Germany (57 schools) and only slightly less than the number in Spain (74 schools). Secondly, the decline is in direct contrast with the rest of the world where the IB has either stalled in growth or has added schools. The decline is therefore not an EU phenomenon, reflecting perhaps an economic recessionary and austerity situation involving education cuts. The decline of the IBDP in England needs therefore to be viewed and assessed within an explicitly England-focused lens of inquiry although the overall implications for the IB may be more far-reaching. The IB still seems to have a long way to go before it has convinced many in England of the need for a relatively expensive, challenging and complicated programme. This forms the framework for the subsequent discussion.

The decline explained

A challenging yet under-valued programme

The IBDP is a challenging programme. It is aimed at high-ability children and has been described in England as being ‘fiendishly tough and appropriate for, at most, 10% of students’ (Pyke, 2007). It is a challenge to obtain ‘top’ grades; each year only about 0.25% of candidates get the maximum 45-points (just 150 candidates in May 2013). Indeed, King’s College London in March 2013 was reported (Cartwright, 2013) as having lowered its entry requirements for IBDP graduates to take A-Level ‘grade inflation’ into account. In this context, the consistently-assessed IBDP is a victim of its own success and this sort of irony should form a core thesis in any analysis of the decline of the programme in England (and maybe Wales also).

The IBDP judges its ‘quality’ by consistency and reliability of assessment (Walker, 2005a). The IBDP has consequently had no ‘grade inflation’ over time. Take for example two random sets of examination results. In May 2013, 79.06% of all IBDP candidate ‘passed’ i.e. they obtained the necessary 24-points. Only 2.04% got over 40-points. In May 2008, 79.17% had ‘passed’ and only 1.90% got over 40-points. Although the number of candidates had risen from 31,285 to 48,637 the results over five years were remarkable similar. These IBDP figures prove two things - many candidates (about one in five) do fail the exam and not many (about one in 50) get very high grades, a direct contrast to what A-Levels had become by 2012. The moral of this story is that at an assessment level the IBDP and A-Level are very different ‘beasts’; they are not substitutes as such.

Vignoles and Green's (2012) study had tracked 140,000 IBDP and A-Level candidates who had entered UK universities between 2004 and 2008. Working on the view that students who had been accepted on the same course with the same ratings, it was argued that they should get the same degree result, yet it was found that on average the IBDP graduates were 4% more likely to achieve a first-class degree. The conclusion drawn was that the IB graduates had been 'under-valued' by the admissions system as they were actually slightly 'better' than their A-Level peers.

It is asserted in practice (e.g. Cookson, 2012) that some universities do not fully understand the workings and rigour of the IBDP, and consequently make admissions offers to students that are unrealistically high. This issue became a controversial reality in 2009 when many students at a string of schools offering the programme for the first time were reportedly (e.g. Ross, 2009) disappointed with their IBDP scores. Parents naturally complained that their school had 'gambled' on the IBDP. One story had appeared (Davis, 2010) about a student in Hammersmith, west London, failing to get a place at Durham University even though she had hit the 37-point IBDP admissions target. This was, according to the UCAS tariff at the time, equivalent to far more A-Level points than she would have needed, pointing to a situation where IBDP candidates are given harder admission targets in spite of undergoing a broader and arguably more rigorous (and perhaps more time-consuming) programme of study, as surveyed by Vignoles and Green (2012). The policy-officer at UCAS was quoted as agreeing that 'the present system does not accurately reflect the breadth of study involved in the IB.' This came at a sensitive time for the IBDP; the programme had a lot of growth momentum in 2009 with 196

schools offering it, 107 on the road to authorization and another 100 had shown an interest. In other words, this issue came at a point in time when the UK looked close to having 300 IB schools by 2013 (as seen, it actually had almost half this amount).

An expensive yet under-funded programme

The IBDP is an expensive programme. Funding is a core reason for the decline of the IB in the UK. The IBDP, which necessitates a broader range of teaching and more specialists, more administration and higher exam-entry costs is subsequently significantly more expensive to operate than A-Levels. Furthermore, it takes two or more years to go through the application authorization process which some schools find expensive to fund (Davis, 2010) and one school reportedly spent GBP 27,000 getting simply to the stage where it could offer the IBDP. In his letter Roskilly (2011) had concluded that ‘the IB’s high support and training costs do not help’. It is reportedly (Barker, 2013) GBP 1,000 more expensive to offer the IBDP per student than A-Level, which costs GBP 4,500 to fund a course of three-and-a-half A-Levels.

The fact that the IBDP is expensive adds to the image that it is elitist. Already in 2014 the IBDP has a distinct elite private school presence whereas previously it had a distinct elite International School presence; alongside the three Greater London-based American Community Schools, one of which offers all four IB programmes, sits leading elite private girls’ schools such as Cobham Hall, North London Collegiate School and

Cheltenham Ladies' College, plus Haileybury and Wellington College. The IBDP in June 2014 certainly stood out as geographically having a 'Southern England' mode of operation, reflecting the fact that the majority of schools are now private ones. Of the 147 schools (in June 2014), 15 are in Greater London, 14 are in Kent, 9 are in Surrey, and 7 are in Sussex the same number as can be found across the whole of Northern England. Five are in Dorset and Devon. This is a far cry from Tony Blair's pledge in 2006 to fund at least one school in every LEA.

The IBDP in England is also fast becoming the preserve of the private sector. The number of children in state schools in England studying the IBDP had dropped sharply in 2008, leading to the fear of another form of 'two-tier' system being openly discussed (Clark, 2009). The total number of students taking the IBDP that year was almost 2,500 representing a 40% rise in just two years. But numbers taking the qualification at comprehensive schools had by fallen 11%. The figures showed that 1,313 pupils at independent schools took the IB in 2008, up from 922 in 2006. In comprehensives, the figure was 452, up on 2006 but down from 510 in 2007 (Clark, 2009).

A unique yet imitated programme

The IBDP remains unique but has been partly imitated. The IBDP has over the past decade partly lost its monopoly status in the UK and now operates among a plethora of 'baccalaureate' options and ideas (see Hayden, 2013), some of which have deliberately

‘aped’ the different elements and breadth of study that make up the relatively ‘complex’ IBDP. The objective of ‘Curriculum 2000’ policy initiative was to increase the breadth of the A-Level (Bell et al, 2005). The first two students had graduated with the ‘Welsh Bacc’ in 2005. The UK’s largest examination body the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) announced in 2007 plans for their own ‘AQA Bacc’.

In 2008 Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) launched the Cambridge Pre-U, and although ‘universities have been slow to embrace the qualification’ (Buchanan, 2013) it was being offered in 150 schools in England in September 2013, almost exactly the same number as offering the IBDP at that point in time. The CIE declines to publish a listing of schools although anecdotal evidence suggests it is predominantly a private or Grammar school offering. More significantly, the number of 150 Pre-U schools equals almost exactly the number of extra schools that the IBDP was predicted to have by 2013 i.e. the 300 schools being predicted (e.g. Mansell and Paton, 2009) equals the current body of 150 plus the Pre-U bloc of 150. In other words, many of the schools that the IB ‘lost’ sometime between 2006 and 2010 may have preferred instead to take up the Pre-U (this issue forms a basis for further research and validation).

In 2012, the Education Secretary Michael Gove announced plans for the English Baccalaureate. The ‘E-Bacc’ was to have been introduced in 2015 in three core GCSE subjects - English, maths and science – for examination in 2017, and then extended later to languages and either history or geography. The plans were subsequently dropped in early 2013. In October 2012 there was ‘leaked’ talk (*BBC News*, October 17) from the

Department for Education about adding an Advanced Baccalaureate to the proposed E-Bacc, perhaps to fully replace the existing A-Level system although it seemed more likely that it would operate alongside the existing set-up. The ‘A-Bacc’, for 16-to-19 year-olds, copied on paper much of the IBDP’s content and included a 5,000-word Extended Essay and an element of voluntary service. The major change from the IBDP was that the ‘A-Bacc’ would allow specialization rather than having to undergo a range of six subjects. There was seemingly no talk of aping ‘Theory of Knowledge’, a core philosophical element of the IBDP. The Labour party backed the idea adding that it would nicely complement their intended technical baccalaureate, the ‘Tech-Bacc’.

A ‘substitute’ to A-Level yet different

The IBDP is often offered alongside A-Levels yet it is a very different ‘pathway’ to university. Undeniably, the growth of the IBDP came about partly through disillusionment with A-Levels. This has partly (for now) being alleviated and the rise, and decline, of the IBDP can be seen as a by-product of some schools ‘jumping ship’ back to A-Levels. The shift by Kings College Wimbledon back to A-Levels in 2012 seemed indicative of this. Just as the IBDP was ‘taking-off’ in 2006, there was talk of a ‘crisis of confidence’ in A-Levels (Henry, 2006). Wellington College in June 2006 had hosted a conference on possible alternatives to A-Levels, and was even calling for a Royal Commission into the ‘failing’ exam-system. A major catalyst had occurred in June 2006 when research among 200,000 students by Durham University had appeared to provide substantial evidence that A-Levels had been getting easier over time, as many

commentators believed. The data had shown that students were achieving up to three grades higher at A-Level than those of similar ability in the 1980s. The research showed that on average candidates who got a Grade F in A-Level Mathematics in 1988 would have got a C in 2005.

The A-Level had been subject to ‘grade inflation’ over a number of years (Henry, 2012a). In fact, the pass rate had risen for 29 years in a row and stood at around 98% in 2012 when the ‘inflation’ subsided after new grade boundaries had been set. Conversely, in the early 1980s less than 10% of pupils had achieved a Grade A yet by 2011 the proportion of As was 27%. Furthermore, nearly 10 per cent of candidates obtained the A-star grade, which had been introduced in 2010. The exam regulator Ofqual had called in April 2012 for a radical overhaul of the A-Level system to include the end of modular courses and the ending of the AS-Level, introduced in year-2000 and taken in Year 11, and instead promised a return to the traditional system where pupils took the examinations at the end of the two-year course (Henry, 2012b).

This creates a paradoxical situation for the IB. On the one hand A-Levels now seem set for further reform and a return to traditional ‘gold-standards’ hastening their re-appeal to previously disillusioned private and state schools. On the other hand the IBDP now seems more difficult to pass than A-Levels thus weakening its appeal to potential candidates. Hence, many state schools by 2008 were seeing demand for the IBDP fall. In this context, the rise and decline of the IBDP was partly to do with the decline and rise of A-Levels.

Conclusions

The sudden decline of the IBDP in the UK (to reiterate, this is mainly *England*) has occurred without much attention. This partly reflects the lack of political opposition and lack of depth of public debate over the IB in the UK. Unlike the US, the IB in the UK has no vocal individual opponents (journalists, politicians, academic commentators) and there is no obvious organization, newspaper or website acting as a conduit for attack. Another major difference is the rather muted nature of the political discussion. One caveat to add is that the moral of the story of the on-going attack on the IB in the US by arch-conservative forces backing minimal federal government involvement in education (see website *truthaboutib.org*) is that it occurred after federal tax-payer funding started in 2003 (see Archibald, 2004). If the funding issue in England's state schools is to be addressed in order to 'protect' the IBDP, it might lead to a more direct political line of opposition.

The decline of the IBDP in the UK is in direct contradiction to the global trend. The lack of growth of the IB in the UK, especially in state schools (moreover, among Academies) has been surprising. It was widely expected, indeed predicted, in 2010 that the IB would have between 300 and 400 schools across the UK by 2013. In other words, it was expected that the UK would have the second biggest bloc of schools in the world, perhaps eclipsing Canada (who had 348 in November 2014). In fact, by November 2014 the UK's bloc of 144 IB schools had fallen beneath Australia's 155 schools, forming instead the

fourth biggest bloc (behind the US, Canada and Australia). Moreover, the UK's bloc of 136 IBDP schools in November 2014 had fallen below Ecuador's 138 thus forming now also the world's fourth largest bloc of IBDP schools.

It is impossible to say with certainty how far the decline in the UK will continue. The situation has been described by the IB itself as a 'death spiral' although one leading supporter was reported (see the interview with Garner, 2013) as defending the IBDP as 'a timeless classic, an icon of educational sense and high standards', adding that 'rumours of the IB's death have been much exaggerated.' One should remember that the figure in November 2014 of 144 schools is historically a high one and the 100-mark was only achieved in 2007. Therefore, one might expect the UK figure to return to the long-term norm of less than 100 schools.

Much will depend on funding changes. It was reported (Vaughan, 2013) that education Ministers were considering increasing funding for the IBDP in an effort to 'protect' the programme in state schools. As noted above, this is potentially dangerous waters for the IB given the events in the US over the past decade. Secondly, there is still the possibility that the less expensive IBCP will take-off in the UK, boosting IB numbers. In 2012 it was on offer in 12 schools in the UK (Barker, 2012). At the same time, there is still time for further reforms to A-Levels and alternatives such as the Cambridge Pre-U could still take-off. The IB no longer has the monopoly situation on 'baccalaureate', or international curricula that it once had.

The IBDP clearly suffers in the UK at an assessment level, both in terms of complexity of structure and perception of difficulty (both to pass it and get ‘top’ grades). Plus, paradoxically, the IBDP remains a consistent and reliable (‘quality’) examination at assessment level, which clearly disadvantages it when offered as an ‘alternative’ to ‘grade inflation’ afflicted A-Levels. Put simply, the strength of the IBDP adds to its weakness in England and Wales. It’s breadth of six subjects, and inclusion of elements such as independent research, community service and a philosophical/ethical course of study (ToK) may give the IBDP a veneer of ‘platinum standard’ but it also deters many potential students and gains relatively little reward at assessment level. Again, ironically, one of the IBDP’s strengths (breadth and stretch) adds to its weaknesses. The UCAS tariff system does little to reward the breadth and intensity of the programme. At the same time many universities seem to still over-look or under-value the ‘Baccalaureate’ elements of the IBDP although the Extended Essay element, for instance, has a long tradition and has even been deliberately ‘aped’ by alternative baccalaureates such as the Cambridge Pre-U and the talked-about ‘A Bacc’.

This paper signs off by reiterating the fact that it is in 2014 too soon to say whether the IB in the UK (and England in particular) is in a permanent spiral of death or merely falling back to a more sustainable and historically-found level of operation i.e. 50-100 schools. The issue will need re-addressing in a few years-times. A major moral of the growth story in the UK is that the IBDP can be boosted by political support and this might re-appear at some point in time if the educational debate, for instance, were to shift back to breadth and balance rather than depth and specialization. The UK was set for

another General Election in May 2015 and this might act as a catalyst for this debate.

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